

Oral History Interview with
JAMES CREASY
MADGE (MRS. JAMES) CREASY

Saturday, Sept. 25, 1999

At Skyland Conference Hall
66th Reunion of the Shenandoah Chapter
of the
Civilian Conservation Corps

Interviewer: Carrie Janey

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Shenandoah National Park
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INDEX

	<u>page</u>	
American Tobacco Company	7	
Aunt Lottie	11	
Barracks #3	11	
Batmen, Bernard	1,6	
Batmen, Dicky	6	
Batmen, Elmer	1,2,9	
Beahm	9	
Being drafted	7	
[Bokion_____], John	5	
Brannon, G.C.	1,5	
Camp 12	1,2,3	
CCC		
Finding out about	2	
Length of work	3	
Moving out mountain people	9	
Couldn't move out relatives	9	
Training	2	
Charlottesville, VA	2	
Creasy, Mary Lucy Rose, mother		1
Creasy, Melvin C., father	1	
Dickey Ridge	1	
England	7	
Florida	11	
Fort Meade, MD	2	
France	7	
Front Royal	3	
Germany	7	
Getting married	7	
Ice, crawling on hands and knees	5	
Little Washington	1	
Luray	3	
Making Tech Sergeant	10	
Mitchell, Fred	2	
Mount Solon, VA	4	
Preston, dynamiter	4	
Raleigh, North Carolina	11	
Recreation	3	
Weekends in town	3	
Richmond, VA	7	
Song – Lonely boy	8	
Ol' Man Brannon	1	
Soldier's Dream	8	

Why daddy	12
Speaks, C.A.	10
Tappy, John	3
Valda (Bernard Batmen's wife)	6
Work	
Driving trucks	1
Dynamiting	4,5
Using 3 crates of dynamite	5
Pipeline work	1
Putting in the Drive	4
Shop mechanic	3

Transcription

CJ: Saturday, September 25, 1999. We're at Skyland Conference Hall at the Reunion of the CCC. I am Carrie Janney and I am interviewing Mr. James Creasy. Tell me a little bit about where you were born, when you were born, who your parents were.

JC: I was born September 3, 1918, in Fluvana County. My parents was Mary Lucy Rose. My dad was Melvin C. Creasy. He was from Albemarle County. Uh, I was born and raised down there, lived there. Went to school at West Central School, and uh I went to the 7th grade, but I didn't finish it, and I left and went in the CCC camp.

CJ: How old were you when you went in?

JC: Uh, I was 18.

CJ: 18.

JC: And I went to Camp 12, and stayed 2 and a half years. I was over there with Elmer Batmen. Lived right down in the Valley over here. And uh, Bernard Batmen was his son, and we slept in the same barracks together, side by side. Uh I stayed there, I dug a ditch to send the water over to that pipeline at Dickey Ridge.

CJ: Mm hmm.

JC: And uh, I was a truck driver. And we had a foreman over there, he, he wasn't their foreman. Well a bunch of us worked together, because that was a long pipeline that they dug.

CJ: Uh huh.

JC: They had this one foreman over there, his name was G. C. Brannon. He lived down at uh, Little Washington, right over the mountain down there.

CJ: Uh huh.

JC: And he was a dog to work for. One of the boys composed a little song, [singing] "Who's that coming, down the ditch, Ol' man Brannon, ya son of a bitch. He is with us, all day long, everything we do is wrong. Uh huh. Uh huh. Where's that pick and shovel king, swing, he's our latest ribboned king. Da da. Da da. Da da.

CJ: Oh that's wonderful.

JC: I don't remember who, which boy composed the song. But we used to sing it, he'd be walking down that steep ditch. And you'd say, "Who's that singing down there, who's that singing." He'd walk down in, then one of them'd stop, the other one'd sing. Uh let's see uh, now. I was over at Camp 12. Uh, Fred Mitchell was the shop foreman, in the shop over there for the trucks. And I worked in the shop. And did mechanical work and uh, a little bit of everything, dug ditches, well in fact I did just about everything that was going on up there. I was a truck driver. I drove truck for Elmer Batmen for, oh I guess several months. And uh, well you can see the picture there.

CJ: Mm hmm.

JC: Yeah. Uh let's see.

CJ: So how did you hear about the CCC?

JC: Pardon.

CJ: How did you hear about the CCC?

JC: Her brother joined the CCC.

CJ: Uh huh.

JC: And uh, so then I said, well hell he said it was good. He told me, he said why don't you join. So I just walked up there and told them I wanted to join the CCC, and they took me right in.

CJ: And where'd you go to enlist?

JC: Charlottesville.

CJ: You went to Charlottesville?

JC: Mm hmm.

CJ: Did they sent you anywhere for physical training before they sent you here? Or did you come directly?

JC: I came, I went to Fort Meade, Maryland.

CJ: Ok.

JC: Went to Fort Meade, Maryland for awhile.

CJ: For mustering?

JC: Yeah, well all kinds, for physical and to check in, and uh we went up and oh done all kind of stuff you know. Then we came up, Camp 12.

CJ: Mm hmm.

JC: Over on the north end, and I stayed over there. I stayed there 2 years, and uh over 2 years, about 2 and a half years, and the time run out. 2 years was the limit, and my time was up. But I was a shop mechanic, working on the trucks and everything, so they kept me several months over until they could get somebody else, train somebody to take over. And uh let's see, uh.

CJ: Well what was camp life like? Did you have a regimented routine every day? Got up at a certain time?

JC: Got up at a certain time, went to eat at a certain time. Uh, everything was pretty much on a schedule. Uh huh. And I was uh, assistant leader, I mean in other words, in charge of the barracks down there. Elmer Batmen and Bernard left, I was in charge of the uh, barracks after that. Let's see, I don't know.

CJ: Did you do any other activities? Did you play ball? Or take any of the classes that they offered?

JC: No, no, I didn't because I was pretty busy. Mechanic then and I wanted to bring the trucks in. A lot of times you'd have to work the trucks over, you know, between uh, get them ready to go out the next morning.

CJ: Right.

JC: Mm hmm.

CJ: Did you ever go down to Luray, or Front Royal on the weekends?

JC: Oh yeah, we used to go to Luray. I had a cute little girl lived down there, but I don't, uh, John Tappy, did you ever hear of him?

CJ: John Tappy?

JC: Yeah, John Tappy, he married this little girl, but I knew, uh I knew and John Tappy knew, but he cut me out, so uh, then I ended up with this over here, so.

CJ: I'm sure you feel pretty lucky right?

JC: Yeah.

Female (wife): He better.

JC: She's pretty lucky. I put up with her 58 years.

CJ: Wonderful.

JC: Yeah.

CJ: So your brother was in the CCC as well.

Female (wife): Yeah, he was in Mount Solon.

JC: Yeah, he went in first.

CJ: And that's how you heard about it?

JC: Yeah, where did he go?

Female (wife): Mount Solon. He went to Mount Solon, Virginia.

CJ: Ok. So he was totally different than you. Different experience.

JC: Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

CJ: Um.

Female (wife): Tell her about the dynamite.

JC: Hmm?

Female (wife): Don't forget to tell them about the dynamite story.

JC: Oh, my God yeah.

CJ: Let's hear about it.

JC: Alright, we was putting the drive in over there and digging the banks and all down. And uh, we used take these jackhammers. Do you know what they are?

CJ: Mm hmm.

JC: You drill holes in the rock, and drill them down in to blow the rock off.

CJ: Mm hmm.

JC: So, they sent me with this, dyn, the boy that did the dynamite work. His name was Preston. P-R-E-S-T-O-N. And uh, he was a dynamite man. But he

was, uh, he was shooting the dynamite and doing all kinds of stuff. So I didn't know at the time, I had to read under the, behind the papers. I put it together, you know what I mean. So they told me one morning to go out with him and shoot this dynamite over there on this road. Cleaned it out, so I went with him over there. And we went by and picked up 3 cases.

CJ: 3 cases of dynamite?

JC: 3 cases of dynamite and went over there. And we, we loaded those holes with dynamite, and loaded them and loaded them. And uh, put it all in and then we, 2 cases we put in there and one case wouldn't go in there so we just set it on top of the ground, on top of the. And then put, hooked it up and went back and shot it. Blowed the whole side of the mountain. And the next morning, old man uh, Brannon asked me, says, "How many sticks of dynamite did you all use down there." I said, "Oh only 3 sticks, Mr. Brannon." "3 sticks hell," he said, "you throw'd rock all the way to Luray!"

CJ: Where was this at, was this up north?

JC: Yeah, north end.

CJ: North end.

JC: Yeah, see that's where I worked at. I worked at north end, from Panorama to Luray, we worked that section there.

CJ: That must have been a sight to see that blow.

JC: Whew, I went up there and got behind a tree, was about that big, and the rocks. One great big one, about that big come down, Whap! Hit the ground right beside me.

CJ: I guess your pretty lucky you didn't get hit, huh?

JC: Yeah, him too. Well let's see now. I guess that's about, oh yeah I can remember when I was there one morning, and it had rained and rained and rained. And to get up through the mists we had to crawl on our hands and knees, the ice was on the ground so bad.

CJ: Wow.

JC: And John [Bokion____] lives down here right in Luray, he was a mess sergeant up there.

CJ: Uh huh.

JC: And he still lives down there, and I go see him every once in awhile.

CJ: Do you?

JC: Yeah.

CJ: Do you keep in touch with a lot of the guys?

JC: Pardon?

CJ: Do you keep in touch with a lot of the guys?

JC: No, no.

CJ: No?

JC: The only one, Dicky Batmen, he was a ranger up here.

CJ: Mm hmm.

JC: And I go by and see him. Do you know where he lives?

CJ: I know Mr. Batmen. Mm hmm.

JC: Yeah, he's got a beautiful place.

CJ: Mm hmm. He does.

JC: He's a good friend of my, yeah. And I knew Bernard Batmen's wife, Valda. Do you know her?

CJ: No.

JC: Well she lives right around the, you know when you cut off of the highway and go in at uh, across the creek, you turn like that and go up to the Batmen section.

CJ: Mm hmm.

JC: Well you make a left turn and go down by that junkyard down there. Just as soon as you pass that junkyard, just as soon as you pass the junkyard, now.

CJ: Uh huh.

JC: She lives in the house right up on the bank, right up.

CJ: Oh ok.

JC: Yeah, she's a lovely lady. Yeah.

CJ: Now what did you do after you left the CCC?

JC: I, I went to Richmond, Virginia, and worked with American Tobacco Company. (Auctioneer yodeling.) Sold to America, LSMFT, Lucky Strike Means Fine Tobacco. And, I went down when the enlistment thing came out you know.

CJ: Mm hmm.

JC: For the draft?

CJ: Mm hmm.

JC: I went down and signed up for that and uh, so I went off, and I got married the 19th of July, in 1941.

CJ: At least he remembers.

Female (wife): Yeah.

JC: So after I got married, I went down to have my uh, my uh oh what the heck do you call it?

Female (wife): Classification.

JC: Classification changed, because I was married see, and I didn't want to go in the army. I was the second person they drew. What they did, they pulled my records up, and then as soon as they started drafting my name was the second one. We was married 2 weeks and then I went in the army, stayed 4 and a half years.

CJ: Oh gosh.

JC: Yeah, I was overseas.

CJ: Where were you?

JC: England, France, Germany. Oh, how much time do you got? Well I was over in England, well did I tell you? I was drafted into the army?

CJ: Mm hmm.

JC: Do you remember? Well you don't remember, but they had a sign, Uncle Sam says I want you, pointing his finger.

CJ: Uh huh.

JC:

Just a lonely boy,
walking down the dusty road,
the only company that I had
the croaking of a toad.
My head was filled with dreams,
and nothing else to do.
But when I came to the mailbox,
there's a card from Uncle Sam,
says, "Boy I want you."
I reported to the army,
to answer duties called.
Only 12 months the card read,
but 4 and a half years later,
I returned in form.
The air was crisp and cool,
the leaves was changing color.
I dropped on my knees and thanked God,
for I was a lucky fellow.

Now I've got another one.
Soldier's dream, World War II. Somewhere in the, in the ETO.
The night was dark and cloudy,
not a star was in the sky,
there was nothing recognizable
but the wind as it whistled by.
There I lay in my foxhole
in the cold damp ground.
I heard someone call my name,
I quickly looked around.
Across the battlefield,
I could see the image of a man,
and as he approached,
he extended a friendly hand.
My son, he says to me,
where had you rather be?
At home, at home I cried,
far across the sea.
He cradled me in his arms
as we ascended into the sky.
Be at peace my child he says,

you'll be home by and by.
I'd visit loved ones and friends I'd long last seen,
only to awake and find it was just a dream.
To you, this may seem strange,
even to compare,
but to me it's all very real,
for I was the guy that was there.

CJ: Wonderful. That's touching.

Female (wife): One more thing you might want to tell them about, when you and Mr. Batmen burned the big house down on the mountain. Those mountain people you had to move out.

JC: Oh yes. She wants, yeah. We used to uh, move these people out, and then we'd go back and burn their house down. And she wanted me to tell it, so.

CJ: Mm hmm.

JC: But we went and uh, moved out some of them. Burnt the house down, and so. What's the name?

Female (wife): Mr. Batmen?

JC: No, his sister's, mother's, Jones, up there on the mountain?

Female (wife): Beahm?

JC: Beahm, yeah, yeah.

Female (wife): Beahm yeah.

CJ: Oh really?

JC: Yeah, Beahm, you knew?

CJ: Uh huh.

JC: She was what?

Female (wife): His mother's people.

JC: Yeah, his mother's people.

Female (wife): Mr. Batmen's mother's people.

CJ: Ok.

JC: So, uh, we went up there to move her one day, and uh, Mr. Batmen told me, I was driving the truck, and he says, "Creasy stop the truck, stop the truck." And I stopped the truck, and we could see the house up there, and they were, and so we stopped the truck, and he got out, and went up there and come back and got in the truck and said, "Turn around, let's go." So we turned around and left. I wondered and wondered and wondered why we did that. Forty years later I uh, was in Mr. Batmen's house, where he lived down there, and he told me what it was. That was his aunt's place and he couldn't move them.

CJ: Uh huh.

JC: So he went back and told Mr. Speaks. C. A. Speaks was the park [camp] superintendent.

CJ: Mm hmm.

JC: And he said, he told the park superintendent, he said, "Well you can fire me or do whatever you want, but I just couldn't do it." That's all right, uh take the guys out and work the trails. He went over there and worked the Appalachian Trail. And then she wanted that told, so we got it in.

CJ: Well thank you so much. This has been wonderful, we've learned so much. I appreciate your time.

JC: I don't think, let's see, I can't think of anything else much. There's a lot's left out, I mean you know.

Female (wife): Oh, yeah one boy in the truck.

CJ: In the what?

JC: Well I had nothing to do with it.

Female (wife): I know it, I know, it's just memories.

CJ: Well that's what we're looking for. Anything you remember about your experience, or, or how its changed your life.

JC: Well uh, it's given me a lot of experience. It prepared me for a lot of things. Prepared me for the army, I went in, I went in the army-air force. I made Tech Sergeant. In just, well a few months.

CJ: Mm hmm.

JC: Because I was assistant leader in the CCC camp, see. So I made out that way pretty well. It uh, got me ready for a lot things. Oh there's something else there, right in the corner of the card, the card, right down in the corner there.

Female (wife): Yeah.

JC: That goes, that's your cot. You put that on the end of your bed.

CJ: Oh? Barracks number 3?

JC: Yeah. Mm hmm.

Female (wife): Save it all these years.

JC: Well let's see, is there anything else I can think of. I guess that's about most of the main things.

CJ: Ok, well thank you for taking the time to talk to me.

JC: Yeah. Now uh, also I'm a songwriter.

CJ: Oh you are?

JC: Now this has got nothing to do with the CC camp, but we were going to Florida one time, but my son lives in Raleigh, North Carolina.

CJ: Uh huh.

JC: So we went through Raleigh and stopped, we stopped there and spent the night. And uh, then we'd go on, driving on the next day. And so my little granddaughter, she was a little, about how old was she, Madge?

Female (wife): Oh about 4.

JC: No, she wasn't that old.

Female (wife): Ok.

JC: Well anyhow, she could talk and get around pretty good, and she wanted to go, she wanted to go to Aunt La La's house. My sister's named Lottie, and her father says, told her, "No, Susan you can't go." "But daddy, I want to go." "No Susan you can't go." "But why daddy?" "Well Susan you can't go?" "But why daddy?" So then going on down the road, I got to thinking and I composed a song [singing]:

Why daddy, why daddy, why can't I go?

Why daddy, why daddy, why say no?
Why daddy, why daddy, if you love me so,
Why daddy, why daddy, why can't I go?

My little daughter, sit on my knee,
Says to me, daddy do you still love me?
Why daddy, why daddy, why can't I go?

Why daddy, why daddy, why say no?
Why daddy, why daddy, if you love me so,
Why daddy, why daddy, why can't I go?

Now my little daughter's grown and gone,
But remember the words all day long,

CJ: Thank you.

JC: Ok.

CJ: I appreciate it.